

Remarks to the Troops at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska

February 16, 2002

The President. Thank you all.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. Thank you all. Colonel, thank you very much. It's nice to be back in Alaska. I was told I was the only President of the United States ever to live in Alaska. And even though that was in 1974, I have incredibly fond memories of such a beautiful, beautiful part of the world.

I want to thank you very much for your hospitality. And I'm so honored that, on my way overseas, that you all would greet Laura and me. I know—I'm confident that you're as proud of her as I am. A lot of people are. People all across America now know why I married her. *[Laughter]* A lot of them are still wondering why she married me. But we're honored to be here.

And I'm honored to be in a place where people understand the need for sacrifice and patriotism. There's no question that Anchorage, Alaska, the Anchorage Bowl is full of people who have dedicated themselves to serving our country, not only those who wear the uniform but the family members of those who wear the uniform. And I've come to Alaska to let you know that I'm proud of our United States military, that when I sent you into action, I knew you would not let this Nation down.

And I want to tell all of you, those who wear the uniform, the family members of those who wear the uniform, and those who support our United States military in Alaska, that our cause is just, our cause is noble, and we will defeat the forces of terror.

I want to thank Doug Miller, and I want to thank General Schwartz and Colonel Nickerson, and thank you all, as well.

As you can see, I'm traveling in some pretty fancy company today. I'm traveling with a man who has put together one of the greatest coalitions of freedom in the history of mankind, a man who has served our country with such incredible distinction and class, a valuable member of my Cabinet, Colin Powell.

And I appreciate—I appreciate the congressional delegation from Alaska, three really fine people, one of whom I traveled from Washington today with, and that's, of course, Senator Frank Murkowski. Thank you, Frank. He, along with Senator Stevens, does a fabulous job in Washington, DC, not only for Alaska but for the country—are tireless advocates for the people of Alaska. And so is Congressman Don Young. You've done a good job by putting good people in Washington, DC.

I don't know whether your Governor has admitted it or not, but he went to Yale. *[Laughter]* He probably slurs his words so it sounds like "jail." *[Laughter]* And we were classmates, and it's probably not politically correct to say it, but we were fraternity brothers. And I'm glad to be here with my old friend Tony Knowles.

I also found another George W., the mayor. I want to thank all the State and local officials who are here. I want to thank the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are here. I want to tell you something: We've got no better friends than Canada. They stand with us in this incredibly important crusade to defend freedom, this campaign to do what is right for our children and our grandchildren.

I want to thank the band, the Top Cover. I know we've got some members of the 3d Wing here today. As the Colonel mentioned, the 3d Wing of Elmendorf had a long and distinguished history of providing top cover for America. The F-15 Strike Eagle drivers and AWACS crews—*[applause]*—I didn't know the AWACS crews were quite that wild. I thought they were kind of a sedentary bunch. *[Laughter]* The radar operators have been providing the homeland defense for more than half a century, and America is grateful.

And I want to thank you for your efforts for Operation Noble Eagle. You've made a huge contribution to this—to our Nation. And as the lead air expeditionary force wing, the 3d Wing's mission is critical to maintaining peace and security around the world. You're good about getting people—the right people to the right place on time.

The people of Elmendorf and Anchorage welcome home more than 500 members of

the 90th Fighter Squadron. I'm glad you got back in time for Christmas. And that's exactly where I'm heading, over to South Korea, so if you've got somebody you want me to say hello to—[laughter]—never mind. [Laughter]

You know, I can't wait to take our message overseas. We're going to Japan and South Korea and China, where I'm going to continue to work with the leaders of those countries in our mutual concerns, starting with fighting the war against terror, making it clear that the resolve of this Nation is steady and strong—to be able to look these leaders in the eye and say, when it comes to defending freedom, the United States of America will not blink.

And I look forward to sharing with them my passionate belief in the values that we hold dear here in America: Freedom, freedom to worship, freedom to speak, freedom to achieve your dreams. And it's those very values that came under attack on September the 11th. The good news is, our mighty military was ready.

You know, when we were attacked, it seemed like the people in the U.S. military took it personally. A reporter asked an Air Force pilot, he said—asked him if he had any direct connection to any of the victims of September the 11th. And he said, "You know, I think we all do. They're all Americans." You see, when you strike one American, you strike all Americans. And those terrorists are going to hear from us.

It's hard for me to figure out what was going through the minds of those who planned and attacked America. They must have thought we were soft.

Audience member. They were wrong!

The President. Yes, they were. They thought we were so materialistic that we didn't understand sacrifice and honor and duty. They must have been watching some lousy movies. [Laughter] They didn't know that this great Nation would rise up in unison to send a clear message that we will do whatever it takes to defend our freedoms, that this great Nation is resolved to find the killers, one by one, and bring them to justice.

But this cause is more than just an individual. Oh, I know sometimes the people on the airwaves like to say, "Well, someone is—

bin Laden's hiding here, and he's hiding there." But this cause is much bigger than a single person. This is about fighting terror wherever it hides. This is about defending America and our friends and allies, defending values. The world must understand that this Nation won't rest until we have destroyed terrorism, until we have denied the threat of global terrorism.

I can't tell you how passionate I feel on the subject. I look around and see your children and your grandchildren. This is an opportunity to defend freedom for them. This is a chance to say that your kids can grow up in a secure and peaceful America, and if they work hard and get a good education, they can realize their dreams in a peaceful world. We long for peace, but we understand that the terrorists must be brought to justice in order to achieve that peace.

Thanks to our military, we're making good progress, and it hasn't taken very long. If you think about it, we've been at this for a little less than 6 months, and we're achieving our objectives.

First, I mentioned the coalition the Secretary of State's working on. And we sent a clear message: Either you're with us, or you're against us; either you stand for freedom, or you stand with tyranny. And the good news is, many, many, many nations have heard that message, and I'm proud to report they stand squarely with the United States in the defense of freedom.

And you all also may remember that early on I said, if you hide a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, if you provide comfort to a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist. The Taliban now knows what we mean. They're gone. And guess what? People in Afghanistan don't miss them one bit. I am proud that our military has fulfilled our mission, our military mission. But in so doing, we liberated a people. We freed women and children from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes in the history of mankind.

But there's more to do in Afghanistan. We're entering a difficult phase of the first theater in the war against terror. They've got a lot of caves over there, but they can't hide long enough. See, we're patient, and we're determined, and we're a steadfast nation. We're steady in our resolve. And that's so

important, because we're trying to run down some people that, on the one hand, send youngsters to their death, and they, themselves, try to hide in caves. But there is no cave deep enough to hide from the long arm of justice of the United States military. We're going to run them down, one by one.

And it doesn't matter where they try to hide. There is no calendar; there is no deadline. There is no "If you don't do it by now, we're just going to go home and take a nap." [Laughter] That's not the way it works. Now that they have laid down the gauntlet, we're going to pursue them, and we're going to get them. And when we do, the world will be a safer place.

But we've got a bigger task than that. One of the most dangerous things that can happen to the future of our nation is that these kind of terrorist organizations hook up with nations that develop weapons of mass destruction. One of the worst things that could possibly happen to freedom-loving people, whether it be the United States or our friends or allies, is to allow nations that have got a dark history and an ugly past to develop weapons of mass destruction like nuclear weapons or chemical weapons or biological weapons which could, for example, be delivered by long-range missile, to become a part of the terrorist network. And there are such nations in the world.

Of course, we'd like for them to change their ways, and we'll continue to pressure them to do so. We'd like for them to conform to normal ways of treating their own people, plus their neighborhood, plus the world. We expect there to be transparency. People who have got something to hide make us nervous, particularly those who have gassed their own citizens in the past, for example.

And so we expect them—and so do other freedom-loving countries—to change their behavior. But if they do not, the United States will do what it takes to defend our freedom. Make no mistake about it.

This is a grand and noble cause, and it's going to require a strong and modern military. I sent a budget up to Congress. The good news is, I don't have to worry about two United States Senators and the Member of the House of Representatives from the State of Alaska.

The budget I submitted is the largest single increase in military spending in a generation. If we're going to fight for freedom, we have to pay the cost to fight for freedom, and it's worth it. And I also believe that any time we send our military into harm's way, they should have the best equipment, the best training, the best possible support. A grateful nation owes it to the United States military. And one other thing, you need another pay raise.

You hear a lot of talk about homeland security. And I want to assure you all, the moms and dads and everybody else here, that we are doing everything in our power to secure the homeland. I mean, we're chasing down every lead, every hint, every possible cell member. We're giving them a chance to share with us what they may or may not know. I mean, we are absolutely defending this Nation.

I can make no guarantees; I do know the enemy wants to hit us again. But every day, my administration discusses how best to make America a more difficult target. Every day, the FBI Director talks about how he has changed the culture of the FBI. We've got thousands of FBI agents working to protect the American people. We're making our borders more secure. We've now got a bio-terrorism initiative we're starting. We're doing a lot, and I'm proud of the efforts of people who are working overtime, constantly working to make the homeland secure.

But the American people must understand, the best way to secure the homeland is to unleash the United States military. And that's exactly what we're going to do.

Oh, I know there's been a lot of focus overseas, but I'm also concerned about this: Any time anybody can't find work in America, I'm worried about it. I'm worried about the fact that the enemy, when they attacked us, hurt our economy. I'm worried about the fact that we need to have a stimulus program that will help people find work.

Listen, I'm more than willing to sign—and will sign legislation that provides people with an unemployment check. But people want more than an unemployment check in America. They want a steady paycheck, and Congress must understand that. I want a stimulus

package on my desk. There's too much politics in Washington. We need to be worried about those people who can't work. We need to be worried about those who can't find work, and understand the role of Government is to create an environment in which jobs are created.

And so one of the things we did up there—or over there, or over and down there—[laughter]—was we cut your taxes. We did it at the right time. And we did it at the right time. The best way to encourage economic vitality and growth is to let people keep their own money. When you spend your own money, somebody's got to manufacture that which you're spending it on. You see, more money in the private sector circulating makes it more likely that our economy will grow.

And incredibly enough, some want to take away part of those tax cuts. They've been reading the wrong textbook. You don't raise somebody's taxes in the middle of a recession. You trust people with their own money. And by the way, that money isn't the Government's money; it's the people's money.

There are some other things we can do and must do in order to create jobs. We've got to trade. I can't wait to talk to the Chinese leadership about getting them to honor their agreements for the American farmers and ranchers to be able to sell our foodstuffs into China. I said all along, there's many, many mouths in the world to be fed, and if I do my job by opening up markets, U.S. farmers and ranchers are going to feed them. We're the best in the world at growing crops and raising cows and hogs, and we ought to be feeding the world. And when we do, that will mean jobs for the American people.

But there's a way to create jobs for the American people right here in Alaska, right here in this important State. You know, I'm the first—I think we're the first administration in quite a while that has ever developed a national energy plan. See, I understand that we need a national energy plan. I understand it's in the national interests, the security interests of the United States of America that we're less dependent on foreign sources of energy. We'll all work hard to put measures in place that encourage conservation. It makes a lot of sense to do that. But folks, we've got to find energy in our own country,

and a great place to start is right here in the State of Alaska.

And a lot of people understand that not only is it in our national security interests that we drill for oil and gas in Alaska, it's good for jobs; it's good for working people; it's good for people to be able to put money on the plate—money on the table so they can feed their families. Listen, we need to be exploring for oil and gas in ANWR.

I've heard them all in Washington; I've heard all the skeptics say, "Well, you can't do that. It's going to ruin this or that." Listen, there's no doubt in my mind; there's no doubt in your Governor's mind; there's no doubt in the congressional delegation's mind; there's no doubt in the minds of people who take a sound, scientific look at this that we can do so without endangering the environment, that we can find energy for America's people and, at the same time, preserve the beauty of Alaska. What we need is a commonsense approach to energy.

Audience members. [Inaudible]

The President. There you are. [Laughter] Let me tell you how proud I am of America. I cannot tell you how fantastically I feel about the people of this country. You see, not only have we shown incredible resolve and strength; this is a nation that is full of compassion and kindness. We are a decent nation. The strength of our country is not the halls of Government. The strength of the country is the people.

And one of the ways—one of the things that people say to me is they say, "What can I do? What can I do to help in the war against terror?" Well, many of you are already answering that call here today, but others aren't. Others are wondering what they can do to help.

As you probably figured out by now, I view this current conflict as either us versus them, and evil versus good. And there's no in-between. There's no hedging. And if you want to join the war against evil, do some good. If you want to be a part of our Nation's stand against those who murder innocent people for the sake of murder, for those who believe in tyranny, for those who hijack a noble religion—if you want to take a stand, love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself.

If you want to be a part of the war, walk across the street and say to a shut-in elderly person, “What can I do to help you,” or mentor a child, or get into your public schools here in Anchorage, or provide support for people, or go to your church or synagogue or mosque and walk out with a program that says, “I want to help somebody in need.” Feed the hungry. If you want to be a part of the war against terror, remember that it’s the gathering momentum of millions and millions of acts of kindness that take place in America that stands squarely in the face of evil.

The enemy hit us, and they made a huge mistake. Not only will our Nation seek justice, but out of the evil will come incredible goodness. Out of the evil will become America more resolved not only to defend freedom, more resolved to sacrifice, if necessary, to defend the freedom, but America resolved to show the world our true strength, which is the compassionate, decent heart of the American people.

It is such an honor to be the President of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth. Thank you for coming out to say hello to Laura and me, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m. in Hangar 3 at the base. In his remarks, he referred to Col. Doug Miller, USAF, vice commander, 3d Wing; Lt. Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, USAF, commander, Alaskan Command; Col. Richard Nickerson, USA, Alaska Chief of Staff; Gov. Tony Knowles of Alaska; Mayor George Wuerch of Anchorage; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks to the Republican Party of Alaska in Anchorage

February 16, 2002

Thank you all. Thank you, Governor—I mean—[*laughter*]. Thank you all for coming. Listen, I’ve been in Alaska long enough to remember when Edith Holmes sang “The Star Spangled Banner.” [*Laughter*] God rest her soul. I actually met Edith when I was living in Fairbanks in 1974. I had the privilege of voting in the Republican primary in 1974. As you know, you’ve got a one-month residency requirement, and I met it. So I

voted. I can’t remember who I voted for, but I was a proud participant. I know I’m the only President ever to have voted in any kind of primary in Alaska. [*Laughter*]

But I have such fond memories of Fairbanks and the Kenai Peninsula and Anchorage. And as you know, there was a period of time when you had kind of weak immigration laws and a lot of Texans came up here—[*laughter*—many of whom were my friends. But such a fabulous State. And thanks for such warm hospitality. And who said your three electoral votes didn’t matter? [*Laughter*]

I’m real thrilled to be traveling with Laura, obviously. The last time I went overseas, she didn’t go. It was right after 9/11. I went to Shanghai for a quick meeting and came back. Now the people of the Far East are going to get to see a fabulous wife and a great mother and a great First Lady for the country.

I do want to thank all those folks who put this on today, and I particularly want to thank the members of the Alaska congressional delegation: Senator Stevens, Senator Murkowski, and Congressman Young. These are three very accomplished, capable, smart people who also have got a little bit of seniority, which helps. [*Laughter*]

But Senator Stevens, I wish he were here because I would like for him to hear what I am going to say about him. He is a—he’s a great legislator who loves America, and he is smart, and I really, really enjoyed working with him. He is a wonderful representative of the State of Alaska, obviously. But those of you who know Ted Stevens, you can’t pigeonhole him just for one State. He really cares deeply about the Nation, as does Frank.

And Don Young and I worked a lot of times together on this airport security bill. And it’s a good piece of legislation, and he deserves a lot of credit for seizing a moment and getting some good legislation through. It was a period of time when it was so important for the country to see that the Government was actually doing something constructive at home to make—to kind of ease the nerves of the American people. And Don did a really good job of working that issue. And